

Street - Ketchum House
(Doctor George A. Ketchum House)
257 St. Francis Street
Mobile
Mobile County
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-798

HABS
ALA,
49-MOBI,
130-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ALA-798

DOCTOR GEORGE A. KETCHUM HOUSE

Location 257 St. Francis Street, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

Present Owner: Dr. Joseph O. Muscat

Present Occupant: Hermann & Hynde Real Estate and Insurance Company

Present Use: Offices

Statement of Significance: This building is the east half of a double house that was typical of Mobile's unpretentious brick residences in the mid-nineteenth century. It was the home of Dr. George A. Ketchum from about 1855 until 1869.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1845.
2. Architect and builder: Joseph Silver
3. Original and subsequent owners: Joseph Silver acquired the adjoining lot on the west of this property in 1841 and built the west half of this double house. In 1845, he sold the completed half and several days later, he bought this adjoining property and built the east half of the structure. The house never served as Silver's residence, but was constructed for speculative purposes. The following chain of title was extracted from the Probate Court Deed Books, Mobile County, and reference is made only to the east half of the building.

1845 Deed April 18, 1845 in Book os 9, page 455
Nannette Durette
to
Joseph Silver
(Lot 3/4' x 110'; \$1,000.)

1849 Deed January 10, 1849 in Book os 14, page 144
Joseph Silver
to
Thomas T. Bolling
(\$4,500)

1852 Deed May 15, 1852 in Book 4 ns page 85
Thomas T. Bolling
to
George A. Ketchum
(Several lots including 35' x 110' on St. Francis Street; \$11,500.)

- 1869 Deed February 17, 1869 in Book 25 page 299 ALA
George A. Ketchum 49. Mob
to 130
Alphonse Hurtel, William T. Ayers, Charles P. Gage
- 1883 Deed December 31, 1883 in Book 49 page 113
Frank C. Gage et al
to
John Neville
(Entire double house and both lots; \$3,500.)
- 1946 Deed May 22, 1926 in Book 400 page 632
Isabella Neville
to
Joseph O. Muscat

4. Alterations and additions: Both sides of the double house still exist, although the western half has been completely obscured by the addition of a projecting modern facade. The entire structure originally had two-story galleries running across the front and continuing around the sides.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

The following information about Joseph Silver and George A. Ketchum is contained in the Alabama Historical Quarterly, Vol. III, Fall and Winter, 1941, pages 402-3, 413-14:

"...George Augustus Ketchum was born at Augusta on April 6, 1825. He was the son of Ralph and Christina Colden Ketchum, and the brother of Colonel Charles Thomas and William H. Ketchum. Prepared for college by private tutors, Ketchum was about to enter the sophomore class at Princeton University when his father's failure in business caused him to do otherwise. At the age of sixteen he began to teach in the female academy at Livingston. Later he studied medicine under Dr. F.A. Ross of Mobile, and was resident medical student in the city hospital for about two years. He took courses in the Medical College of South Carolina at Charleston in 1844-45, went to Philadelphia and served as an interne in the Blocksley Almshouse, and attended the University of Pennsylvania and graduated with an M. D. degree in 1846. Returning to Mobile to practice, he was there during the yellow fever epidemics of 1847 and 1848. Ketchum was one of the first, if not the first, to administer large doses of quinine in the early stages of the disease, a practice which later became rather general. In 1848 Ketchum was elected physician to the city hospital at Mobile, and during the same year, he and Dr. J.C. Knott established a private infirmary to accomodate sick Negroes. With Dr. Knott and others, he assisted in the organization of the Medical College of Alabama. He was elected professor of theory and practice of medicine and later became dean of the faculty. Ketchum went as a volunteer surgeon with the first company of state artillery to Pensacola, and was there commissioned surgeon of the Fifth Alabama Infantry; he later became surgeon of an organization created in Mobile for the defense of the city against

disease. At various times before and during the war he was a member of the city council, and was one of the officials to surrender Mobile to General Gordon Granger in 1865. Taking an active part in the organization of the State Medical Association in 1847, Dr. Ketchum was its first secretary, aided in the reorganization of the association in 1868, and was made its president in 1874. He was a member of the Mobile Medical Society, the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the Ninth International Medical Congress. Through the years of his professional service Dr. Ketchum was president of the Mobile Medical Society several times, president of the Mobile Board of Health, and was primarily responsible for the City of Mobile having an abundant supply of pure water. Several of his articles were published in the Proceedings of the Medical Association of Alabama, the most important being Periodicity of Disease, Report on the Diseases of Mobile and The Sanitary Needs of the State. He married in 1848 Susan Burton of Philadelphia, a descendant of one of the original Quaker families who came to America with William Penn. The only child was a daughter."

"...Joseph Silver was born March 14, 1818, at Dublin, Harford County, Maryland and died at Montgomery Hill, now Tensaw, Baldwin County, Alabama, June 30, 1869. His father placed him under a Dr. Davis to study medicine, but, after six months, he went to Booneboro, Washington County, to continue his studies under Dr. William Whiteford. Because his inclinations were mechanical instead of medical, Silver abandoned the study of medicine and went to Philadelphia. He then went to Louisville, New Orleans and Mobile. Silver was employed by a contractor in Mobile but subsequently returned to New Orleans and bought an interest in the John T. Donald and Company, a firm (sic) operating as cotton commissioners. Soon after 1840 Silver sold his interest in John T. Donald and Company and moved to Montgomery Hill. From 1840 to 1865 he acquired more than 6000 acres of land which was valued at \$30,000; his mills were worth \$4,000. In addition to being a planter and a large landowner, Silver was a member of the firm of Silver, Wragg and Company of Mobile. He was a Presbyterian. In 1844 he was married to Martha Hodgens Booth of Montgomery Hill."

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views

Bird's Eye View of the City of Mobile, Alabama, 1873,
Cincinnati: Ehrgotte T. Krebs, 1873.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Lewis Troost Map (c. 1840), City Hall, Mobile

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,
Mobile County

b. Secondary and published sources:

49-Mob

130.

Alabama Historical Quarterly, Vol. III, Fall and Winter, 1941.

Mobile City Directory, Mobile: Farrow & Dennett, 1859, 1867, 1869.

Nineteenth Century Mobile Architecture. An Inventory of Existing Buildings, Mobile: Mobile City Planning Commission, (unpublished manuscript to be published in 1972).

Southern and Southwestern Surveying and Publishing Company, City Atlas of Mobile, Alabama, from Actual Surveys and Records, Baltimore: G.M. Hopkins, 1878.

Prepared by Linda Carroll
Student Historian
August 29, 1966
and
Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
August 17, 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The former presence of continuous two-story galleries on the front and side of this house was unusual in Mobile, where these elements are generally confined to the front and rear of residences. The brick structure itself, however, is typical of mid-nineteenth-century masonry houses in Mobile.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is in generally good condition, although the interior of the second floor, which is vacant, has been neglected in recent years.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The existing rectangular structure, measuring 26'-11" (three bays) across the front, and 39'-3" (four bays) in depth, excluding the front porch, consists of three-and-a-half stories, including a high basement. Evidence in the rear indicates that there was originally a large service wing.
2. Foundations: Not accessible.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Brick bearing walls are painted white, in varying degrees of finish. The east gable end is carried up between the chimneys to form a flush parapet.

4. Structural system, framing: Wooden floor and roof framing appear to be of the ordinary type.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: There is a covered one-story veranda with a deck on the north front. Cast-iron trellis posts and railings have a geometric pattern and are comparatively late in date. A well in the existing veranda floor houses a cast-iron flight of steps with eleven risers running parallel to the facade and the street, an arrangement that is unique in Mobile. Traces on the masonry of the basement wall indicate that a similar flight of steps was located farther to the west. Evidence gathered from nineteenth-century views and maps, plus the physical evidence on the east wall of the building itself, indicate that the existing veranda represents a late alteration. Originally, there was a gallery that ran completely around the building, at the height of the basement window heads, connecting with the galleries of the rear service wing. It is likely that the gallery had two stories, although the top story may have been an uncovered deck, and the entire construction was undoubtedly made of wood, and not cast iron. Unverified local tradition states that there was a curved staircase that led from the sidewalk to the first level of the gallery, and this is likely, considering its proximity to the street.
6. Chimneys: The two chimneys on the east wall are encased within the parapet, with no projection from the face of the wall.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is an unframed low door in the north basement wall, one step down from sidewalk level. It consists of three panels, the upper being glazed, and is flanked by 6" wide sidelights (modern). On the first floor above the basement door is the main entrance. A four-panelled wooden door is framed by square posts with simple moulded capitals. The posts are flanked by sidelights, consisting of four vertical lights over a wooden panel, and there is a low five-light transom. The entire opening is framed by plain jambs and an architrave of two wide overlapping boards. There is also a door on each level in the south wall, now sealed, since the galleries no longer exist.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All windows are presently double-hung wooden sash with six-over-six lights. It should be noted, however, that the existing windows are probably replacements, since all the windows on the first story, and most on the second story, were originally floor-length, giving access to the galleries. Patches in the brickwork beneath the windows give evidence of the alterations, but it is not known whether the floor-length openings were entirely glazed, or whether there were hinged wooden panels at the bottom, such as still exist on one of the openings in the south wall. The sills of

all the existing windows are plastered, as are the flat arches above the windows on the north front, in accordance with local custom. All windows on the first and second stories were originally equipped with adjustable wooden louvered shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: There is a gabled roof covered by asphalt shingles. The roof over the non-existing service wing was also gabled, with the pitch continuing over the two-story wooden galleries.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a simple denticulated brick cornice crowning the north facade.
- c. Dormers, cupolas: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The interior of the basement has been altered with new partitions to form office spaces. On the first floor, there is a side hall on the west with two equal rooms on the east. These rooms were originally a double parlor, separated by large sliding doors, but the doors have been moved into the hall, where they have been used to close off the hallway and create an entrance foyer. The second floor plan is similar, except that the two rooms are separated by a band of closets on either side of a doorway, and the north end of the hallway is enclosed to form a small room. A stairway in the hall leads to the attic, which is a single finished room, with only two windows on the east wall.
2. Stairways: The main stairway consists of a long flight up to a landing, from which a door led to the rear gallery, and a short return flight to the second floor. The newel is octagonal and the railing consists of turned balusters. Above the main stairs is a steep flight leading directly to the attic. With winder treads at the bottom, the risers of this flight are 12" high.
3. Flooring: The flooring consists of random-width tongue-and-groove pine boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: On the first floor, walls and ceilings are papered; on the second floor and attic, walls and ceilings are painted plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: Doorways and windows on the first floor are beautifully framed by eared architrave mouldings that rise slightly to a point above the openings and have extremely subtle batters. The jambs of the windows are slanted and there are wooden panels beneath the sills. Doors on the first floor have four panels; those on the second floor have six panels, and have simple frames with three-light transoms.

6. Special decorative features, trim: A plaster ceiling medallion consisting of concentric circles exists in the first-floor hallway, and a curious pierced cast-iron medallion is located in the center of the ceiling of the first-floor northeast room. Also in the double parlor is a continuous plaster ceiling moulding, but there is no cornice moulding on the walls, although it may have been removed when the walls were papered.
7. Notable hardware: None.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: On the first floor, there are two white marble mantelpieces with the grate openings plastered over. The two fireplaces of the second floor have simple wooden mantelpieces with cast-iron grates and extremely ornate cast-iron frontispieces. A dismantled cast-iron frontispiece found on the second floor, perhaps originally located in the demolished service wing, bears the foundry marking: "James E. Jackson, NY Patent 1852 M 74".
 - b. Lighting: Modern electric lights have been installed, but outlets for gas fixtures are found in the second-floor rooms, located near the doors and windows.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is on the south side of St. Francis Street between Claiborne and Jackson Streets, facing north. It is the east half of a double house that has been altered beyond recognition on the west side, and is located in an area which is depressed today, but was a fashionable residential area in the nineteenth century.
2. There are no existing outbuildings or landscaping, and the attached service wing has been demolished.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervising Architect
National Park Service
July 26, 1966
and
Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
August 18, 1972

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic

American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor, Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Rosenberg (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foil (Auburn University), and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, were made possible by contributions from numerous local architects and businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmes, President. The project was edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.